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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E,
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [MCAP](#) [ASEC](#) [ER](#)
SUBJECT: ERITREA'S CORRUPT AND DIVIDED MILITARY

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for Reason 1.4 (d)

11. (S) SUMMARY: The Eritrean military's five regional commanders are bitter rivals and would actively contest a coup attempt by any of the others, according to a knowledgeable contact. Isaias personally selects the regional commanders' deputies to act as spies, and rotates them frequently. Lower and middle ranked officers are frustrated by lack of promotions. Eritrea's officer corps, dating from Eritrea's war of independence, will soon be replaced by conscripts with less loyalty to the Isaias regime. END SUMMARY.

PERSONAL RIVALRIES AMONG TOP MILITARY COMMANDERS

12. (S) A non-Eritrean contact with extensive knowledge and experience in Eritrea dating back to the struggle told Emboff that the Eritrean Defense Force's (EDF) five regional military commanders personally hate each other and are bitter rivals. He added, however, that they are collectively dissatisfied with the Isaias regime, but continue propping it up for two reasons. First, they are profiting handsomely from smuggling food, fuel, and other consumer goods into Eritrea, a practice Isaias allows to buy the generals' loyalty. Second, these personal rivalries run so deep that any single general attempting to overthrow Isaias would be immediately contested by the other four, in an effort save their positions, fortunes, and possibly their lives. The contact believes any moves by the generals must, therefore, be coordinated among several of them to have any chance of success.

DEPUTIES/SPIES

13. (C) The contact also said that Isaias rotates a group of brigadier generals serving as deputies among each of the regional commanders. These deputies serve as Isaias' spies, and are frequently rotated to prevent collusion with the regional commanders. In addition, EDF divisions are frequently rotated among the regional commanders to combat the formation of loyalty between soldiers and commanders.

NON-EXISTENT PROMOTION OPPORTUNITIES AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

14. (C) There is reportedly growing dissatisfaction among the EDF's officer corps due to lack of promotion opportunities. The contact said that the GSE's force retention policies have clogged the higher ranks of the Eritrean military, leaving many resentful officers in their forties and fifties as captains and majors for ten or more years.

15. (C) In addition, the EDF's drafting of an officer corps (a practice started in 2001) could, according to the contact, spark a lower-level military rebellion in coming years if Eritrea continues fielding a large conscript army. Many of the current battalion (major/colonel) and brigade commanders (colonel/brigadier general) are hold-overs from "the struggle," and are nearing retirement age. The EDF will soon be forced to replace these former fighters with drafted officers who have no direct connection to the liberation war.

The contact added that these officers will not be of high enough rank to enjoy the financial benefits of smuggling, making them potentially even more inclined to foment a coup than their predecessors.

16. (S) COMMENT: Post contacts have speculated that the regional commanders growing dissatisfaction with the Isaias regime could lead one of them to orchestrate a coup. The contact's assessment of the need for coordination of a plot among the commanders, if true, reduces this likelihood. For this coordination among rivals to take place, the generals would likely need a common complaint, such as Isaias interfering with their smuggling operations. END COMMENT.
MCMULLEN